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AUTHOR Kunz, Brian
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ABSTRACT

This paper is an account of Russian and American educators exploring the use of experiential education in schools and organizations. The goal of experiential education is to find harmony between the individual and the group. In August of 1988, 18 students and 2 professors from the Soviet Union came to Dartmouth (New Hampshire) as part of a University exchange. During their stay they participated in experiential activities including a rope course and many problem-solving exercises. In July of 1989, an American educator visited the USSR and lectured to groups of faculty, researchers, and students on experiential education. The vice president of Moscow State University invited the educator back to lecture throughout May and June of 1990. The Soviets are interested in experiential education because they believe the method will help them develop new strategies to cope with the changes going on in the USSR including the challenge of recognizing the individual after years of totalitarian rule. Cultural characteristics of the United States are individualism, cooperation, innovation, democracy, and individual ownership. Cultural characteristics of the Soviet Union are cautiousness, unpredictability, intensive work and rest, communal work, and centralism and decentralism. The educator lectured to psychologists, students, colonels from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, college faculty, and staff of language institutes, a narcology clinic, and factories. (KS)

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REPORT OF VISIT TO MOSCOW STATE UNIVERSITY

Brian Kunz B.A.
Formerly Associate Director Boston University S.U.R.G.E Program.
Currently Assistant Director Outdoor Programs
Dartmouth College

This is an account of Russian and American educators exploring the use of experiential education in schools and organizations in a rapidly developing environment of the nineties. Expertional Education makes action rather than theory the theme; and the goal is to find harmony between the individual and the group.

In July and August of 1988,18 students with two professors from the Soviet Union came to Dartmouth as part of a University exchange. During their stay they participated in experiential activities, including a ropes course and many problem solving exercises. This group came from three different Soviet Universities, and during their U.S. visit attempted something quite alien to their culture : they tried to become a unified effective group using our methods which call upon each individual to contribute his best personal effort and at the same time combine that with every other participants equally sincere personal effort.

The first session of dynamic interactions was led by Karl Rhonke of Project Adventure. The participants included Russian students and Russian and Dartmouth faculty who were impelled to lower their guard and respond in an outgoing manner to Rhonke a complete stranger. Everyone was encouraged to behave naturally in a situation in which they might otherwise have felt more constrained. We found the Russians exalted by this sense of freedom.

We found that, for all their enthusiasm, the Russian males assumed all females in the challenging activities were automatically considerd part of the problem rather than part of the resources to overcome the problem. One of the American female participants was quick in realizing what was happening to the women, and she rallied them, giving them the confidence to attempt the set challenges without the men. The Russian women immediately regained initiative and excelled at overcoming the problems.

The Soviet women decided to have a day on the high ropes course by themselves. both groups of men and women were challenged individually had to take risks and support others in their attempts on the course. They found the excersises to be a powerful metaphor that challenged their perceptions of Soviet society. Prof. Konstantin Burdin the leader of the Russian Delegation, was so impressed that as we left the course he said " we have to start such a program in Russia. And when he returned to Russia he wrote me:

> The Ropes Course training is extremely useful for everyone inasmuch as it solves a number of problems...those linked to the activity of small collectives with common goals as well as those other problems facing each member of the collective. The well thought-out complex of exercises and the psychological comfort created by a tactful teacher gives birth to peace of mind and confidence in overcoming even the most complicated obstacles... given well co-ordinated collective work.

He suggested a Soviet-American project which would allow us to lay the ground work for expansion of the idea of a Ropes Course into Soviet higher educational institutions, high schools and specialized schools.

In July of 1989 I visited the USSR as amember of a joint US/Canadien team climbing in the Pamirs mountain range of Soviet central Asia. During our stay in Moscow, I met with Prof. K. Burdin and lectured

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to groups of faculty, researchers, and students on experiential education. During one lecture a Soviet commented that it sounded good but it wouldn't work with Russians' we are different'. Others asked for demonstrations or some 'hands on' experience.

Immediately I rallied all present to join me in a series of spontaneous exercises light hearted and yet crucially dependent upon everyones willingness to protect whoever volunteered to be the games guienea pig. One result of the spontaneous exercises was that a professor from the group pledged himself to assist me in any way he could . He got himself appointed to be my laison officer thruout all my visits to Russia. the next day Prof. Burdin and I met with Vice Pres. Tropin of Moscow State Univ. Burdin pointed out that the University was built under Stalin and that the architecture of this period was designed to intimidate the individual; it must be understood that Marxism did not do this to the Russians, it is their heritage. I must admit that the massive doors made me feel small and insignificant. This theme of repressing the individual, eliminating the 'I' and only using "WE" is endemic throughout Russia. Time and again students would tell me that in their society the individual has never had freedom for self-expression.

Univ. Vice Pres. Tropin was receptive and well-informed with my methods. He ended our interview by inviting me to lecture throughout May and June of 1990 to audiences of all disciplines at the University and to keep him up to date with the current literature.

Throughout the next nine months of correspondence, I sent V.P. Tropin THE THEORY OF EXPERENTIAL EDUCATION, 9EDS. Kraft, Sakofs) and THE METAPHOR OF ADVENTURE, Bacon), literature about experiential education in schools and Outward Bound. Burdin gathered support from the University Psychology and Biology dep artment as well as from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Committee on Education.

Back in Hanover I found support from Dartmouth with Prof. Christian Jernstedt, Psychology department professor doing research on experiential education, who shared his research methods and results and encourged me to present his ideas to the Soviets. The President and the Dean of the College also gave encourgement, and I received a leave of absence so that I could accept the V. P. Tropin invitation.

What's happening? Why are the Soviets interested in experiential education? Here are some noteworthy excerpts from the N.Y. Times.

> "Farewells and on to Moscow for Younger Set" by Felicity Barringer., N.Y. Times, Sunday, Nov. 26, 1989. [1]
>
> Where once Soviet officials used the limited academic exchange slots for postdoctoral physicists, chemists, and engineers, hoping to transplant Western scientific skills, they now use the vastly expanded exchange opportunities to send lawyers, sociologists and high school and college students. The goal, American officials believe, is to transplant less quantifiable skills: independent thinking, motivation, risk-taking and choice-making.
>
> "There is an awareness at the highest levels of the Soviet educational leadership that there are gaps in Soviet training that need to be dealt with now," said Dan Davidson, an official of the American Council of Teachers of Russian, who heads the United States-Soviet High School Academic Partnership Program. This was begun last year under the auspices of an agreement signed by President Reagan and President Gorbachov in Moscow in 1988.

> "American Challenge: Teaching Democracy" by Susan Chira, N.Y. Times, Thursday, Jan. 25, 1990. [2]
>
> American teachers and scholars are helping schools in Eastern Europe with a new task: how to teach democracy and practice it in societies that for decades have known only dictatorships - U.S. will work with educators in Eastern Europe to revise curriculum and eliminate authoritarian methods of teaching and administration.
>
> How do teachers used to lecturing to obedient classes teach students

to speak out and challenge them?

Mary Butz, who supervises staff development for the New York City Board of Education, will tell Polish teachers her teaching strategies including how to use the Socratic method, debate and role-playing to encourage students to express controversial opinions.

"It is a hard thing to teach democracy in the abstract", Ms. Butz said.

I'm sure we all agree with Ms. Butz in that it is indeed difficult to teach in the abstract. We know that experiential methods work best, are retained longer and are more readily adaptable to new situations than other methods of education.

Our perceptions of the Soviets' interest in experiential education are also supported by a Soviet booklet, "Towards Higher Standards in Education through its Humanization and Democratization" prepared by Gennadi Yagodin. [8]

Events, actions, deliberate choice and risk are as necessary to the personality as exercise is to the muscles. In case these events do not happen, a person strives to cause them to happen. Joining an unofficial group helps an adolescent to realize his active stand in life, gives him a sense of fullness in life and a keen feeling of comradeship.

....Important tasks need to be tackled in developing physical training at schools. Daily lessons in physical culture that are simple, interesting and useful to children of every age are required. What we need is conditioning exercises and sports games that would create in a child the lifelong habit of keeping fit and inculcate in him a need for exercise.

I received the official invitation from Professor Tropin in March: [Appendix 2]

In recent years an intensive program of student exchanges between Moscow State University and Dartmouth College has been established....Soviet students...became acquainted with a promising method of instruction in which students obtain experience in working and communicating in small groups; in the United States this method is referred to as "experiential education."....Taking into account the significant achievements attained by the psychology-based methods of instruction that lie at the root of the "experiential education" courses, and also the positive results which have been attained by their use at the early stages of instruction at American universities, Moscow University considers it worthwhile to become more closely connected with the theoretical and practical aspects of experiential education...We are asking Mr. Kunz to give a series of lectures in May of 1990 on the theory and practice of experiential education for teachers, graduate students, and undergraduates in the humanities and natural science departments at Moscow State University, and also for employees of the State Committee on Education, the Ministry of Health, the Children's Fund, and other agencies. In June of 1990, during the summer practicum for students in Moscow State University's departments of biology and geology, Mr. Kunz will be given the opportunity to conduct practical lessons at the Zvenigorod Biological Research Station of Moscow State University....We view the invitation of Brian Kunz as an important step for bringing the forms and methods of instruction used in each country closer together.

On May 1, I flew to Moscow and was met by Eugene Gavrilenko, the enthusiastic professor of the summer before. He was to devote the next two months to my visit, arranging lectures, and dealing with the bureaucracy. Eugene and his wife, Ilona, are very committed to introducing experiential education into their country. I don't know really how, with such limited exposure, so many people seemed committed to experiential education, but it is extremely encouraging for the future of this work. Russians look deeply into things - more than we do. Think about our guessing about shifts in political fortunes of Kremlin leaders by their places atop Lenin's tomb during official events. A subtle shift in one's closeness to the leader was significant. That may explain how Russians can pick up subtle messages in a group. Soviets cannot rely on the media to receive their news; speaking out and asking questions have not always produced good results for Russians; they have learned to watch , to be observant, to make their assessment, and to respond accordingly.

During my two visits to the U.S.S.R., I noticed some key cultural differences between Soviets and Americans. Lawrence and Vlachoutsicos, in, *Behind Factory Walls* (1990),[4], present a comparison of Soviet and American cultural characteristics from F. J. Turner's, *The Frontier in American History* (1920),[7], and works by Klyuchevskiy, Lichutin, and Piskotin [3,5,6]. I would like to highlight these

below, as I found what these authors are describing to be very consistent with my own experiences with the Russian people.

Cultural Characteristics of the United States: [4,7]
1.Individualism. Coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness. Quick to find expedient means, practical, inventive. " A masterful grasp of material thngs, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; restless, nervous energy, dominant individualism working for good and for evil and with all the buoyancy and exuberance that comes with freedom."

2.Cooperation. Americans had a means of supplementing their individual activity by informal combinations, including a great capacity for extra-legal, voluntary associations. This power of the newly arrived pioneer to join together for a common end without the intervention of government institutions was one of our marked characteristics. Examples of this are log-rolling, house raising, husking and quilting bees, camp meeting, mining camps, the vigilantes and cattle-raising associations. The squatters associations protected their members against the speculators by securing title to their clearings on public domain. This attitude is one of the most characteristic and important features of the Amerian today.

3.Innovation. Courageous determination to break new paths, indifference to dogma or that just because an institution or conditions exists, it must remain so. Spirit of innovation.

4.Democracy. The ideal of a free, self-directing people, responsiveness to leadership in the forming of programs and their execution, but insistance that the procedure should be determined by free choice and not be compulsory.

5.Individual ownership. Land was the primary object of ownership. Land on the frontier seemed free for the taking and this reinforced the notion of individual ownership.

Negative aspects to individual ownership and frontier democracy include strong selfishness and individualism, intolerance of administration, valuing experience over education and pressing individual liberty beyond its proper bounds. Individuals locked in competition periodically erupt in violence. Tension between competitors and cooperative tendancies continue. Innovation and change has fostered chauvenistic nationalism and adventurism. Private ownership can turn into excessive materialism and democracy can dissolve into factionalism and separatism.

CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOVIET UNION [4]
1.Cautiousness. Great Russia with all its forests, marshes, and bogs at every step presented to settlers thousands of minor dangers, unforeseen difficulties and unpleasant things, with which it was constantly necessary to cope and struggle. They trained the Great Russian to. . . look both ways.. . In the battle with unexpected blizzards and thaws, with unforseen August frosts and January sleet, (the Russian) began to be more circumspect than farsighted; he learned to think more of consequences than to make goals; he nurtured in himself the ability to sum up things concerning craftsmanship and to make estimates.

2.Unpredictabilty. (However cautious,) the thrifty Russian at times loves to make the most hopeless and least careful decisions, contrasting the caprice of nature with the caprice of his own courage.

(This gives the impression that) the Russian seems to be indirect and insincere. (He) thinks ambiguously and this seems like duplicity. He always goes straight to his goal even though it is often not carefully considered. He goes, looking about him, and for this reason his gait seems evasive and hesitant.
3.Intensive work and rest. The great Russian is sure of one thing:...that nature allows him little suitable time for working the land.... This forces the Russian peasant to hurry to work hard in order to accomplish much in a short time... and then to be idle in the fall and winter. (He is) are capable of great exertion of labor but (at the same time) lacks the habit for regular, moderate, measured, and constant labor. [3]

4.Communal work. The inclination to work together in groups developed gradually. "Sociability and the qualities of the noisy crowd are characteristic of Russians." [5]

Because medieval Russian commerce developed under conditions where land was relatively plentiful, rules limiting individual land use seemed unnecessary. In terms of self-management, the peasant commune had extensive jurisdiction. It managed the distribution of lands and regulated their use, alloted tax, selected village authorities, and organized mutual aid. By the end of the 19th century the peasant commune had developed characteristics of cliquishness and rigidity that tended to tie the peasants to the land and blocked the growth of the whole Russian market and capitalism.

5.Centralism and decentralism. " Geography was a primary force behind the development of unity and centralism in the Russian character. " Rivers promoted communication. Centralization was born in the struggle against the Mongol-Tartar yoke. "Dispersion of the population throughout huge territories, poor roads, illiteracy, and an undeveloped political life provided the base for centralization of power. Despite its negative aspects, people understood that centralization was a necessary guarantee against organized enemy attack and the arbitrary rule of local officials." [6]

Decentralized approaches to organized state government grew out of the colonization of Siberia and Peter the Great's program to build the Russian fleet and the building of the great Siberian railroad. Historically, the Russian people have passed through wave after wave of turbulence and crisis.

THE LECTURE AND LESSONS

I delivered my first to thirty-five Psychologists from the State Committee on Education. First I explained what is meant by the term experiential education and my professional involvement in it at Dartmouth College and Boston University and Outward Bound. I told them that the only way to benifit from E.E. is to particip
ate in it at this moment with everyone formally dressed and behaving in a formal manner I introduced them to the concept of responding naturally to a series of questions in which people had only to raise their hand in acknowledgement to any question if it in any way touched on an event in their lives. This exercise allowed individuals to express themselves in a group context where they felt support from the other members.We moved into a more active game involving decision- making and movement. .
I then told them the history of Outward Bound, the experiential education movement in the United States and how it has been adapted to different groups and different needs to combat everything from lack of self-confidence to the willingness to work effectively in a group.
The learning goals of experiential education are:

1. To increase the participants sense of personal confidence.
2. To increase mutual support within a group.
3. To develop an increased level of agility and physical coordinatiion.
4. To develop an increased joy in ones physical self and in being with others.
5. To develop an increased familiarty and identification with the natural world.

The Russian State Committee on Education is interested in learning more about research, costs of programs and the psychological theories behind them. They want to know how outdoor adventure activities differ from more traditional sports activities. They want to translate Kraft and Sackof (Theory of Experiential education) for distribution in Russia.

They kept me busy during the rest of my stay visiting schools including Pushkina where I had a wonderful opportunity to work directly with students. I was able to construct many of the outdoor training units we use at Dartmouth and work with groups of up to 15 students while scores of willing participants looked on. In the boarding schools I visited it was the homesick students who made use of our ability to encourage students to reach out rather than hide in the dark corners of their school. .

I lectured thirty-five Colonels from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Their special interest was in youth-at-risk. At that time the Militia had a new leader Vadim Bakatin whose progressive attitude was trickling down through the ranks.

I continued to lecture at the University's psychology and biology departments, as well as language institutes, narcology clinic and factories. I introduced practical lessons to students from normal schools, special language schools, polytechnical schools, and University students.
To summarize: I returned with proposals from the University, psychologists and special institutions [Appendix 3], all of whom are looking forward to the benifits of experiential education. They feel strongly this method will help them to develop new strategies to cope with the changes going on in their country, including their foremost challange of recognizing the individual after years of totalitarian rule.

CONCLUSION

It is clear to me that Americans and Russians educators stand at a crossroads . The better route taken will be the one which they travel together; the one where we can so easily share our experience. Experiential education helps small groups define their goals while encouraging individualism in the context of a collective. It teaches people the importance of listening to others, encourages independent thinking, and motivates risk-taking and trust. It realizes all the tenets of democracy and still allows individuals to emerge as leaders. It encourages people to speak out and challenge themselves and society. Experiential education provides events that demand a deliberate choice and this creates a sense of urgency which provides combustion for the kind of learning that will be remembered for a lifetime.

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